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KENNEDY REMEMBERED

Cuba and Consequences

Richard Helms, 70, was the CIA's deputy director for operations under Kennedy and its director under Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. He is now a consultant in Washington.

I do recall. I was sitting at lunch at the agency with John McCone, who was then director, and two or three other senior officers of CIA, when suddenly Mr. McCone's aide came through the door and said that the president had been shot. And I realized very quickly that my responsibility was to get the lines out as rapidly as possible to see if there was anything else going on anywhere else in the world. Could this be part of a conspiracy? A concerted attack on the United States or its leadership? It became manifest within 24 or 48 hours that this was not the case, but in the early hours, one had no way of knowing.

The assassination catapulted him immediately into a kind of pantheon because of the way he died. I found both John Kennedy and Bob Kennedy men of integrity, strongly patriotic, tough-minded in the area of foreign policy, prepared to stand up to their responsibilities. But a lot of the sheen that's implied in the word "Camelot" has come off the administration since. By the time he was assassinated, his

programs in Congress were in terrible trouble. He was one of those who inevitably got us deeper into the war in Vietnam; those who attempt to say that President Kennedy would never have gotten us into Vietnam the way President Johnson did have a very hard time, I think, supporting their claim. Pure presumption on their part. Pure assumption.

There are those who for some reason write that President Kennedy really didn't mind very much about the Cuban thing. Hell, he minded a great deal. He was *wild* with Castro, and the whole government was pushed hard to see if there wasn't some way to unseat him. The fact that the agency was not able to get the results was something that did not please him, and it didn't please his brother, either.

I'm also not quite sure why these advisers to President Kennedy are preening themselves over the remarkable job they did handling the missile crisis. I lived through that period here, and it was tense, God knows. But there had to be in the minds of that so-called



HELMS: 'NOT A GOLDEN MOMENT FOR FOREIGN POLICY'

ExCom, or Executive Committee, the knowledge that the United States' nuclear weapons far exceeded the strength of the Soviet Union, and that there was very little the Soviet Union could do to force itself through the quarantine.

Jack McCloy, who was then advising President Kennedy on disarmament, tells about sitting on a fence at his house up in Connecticut with Kuznetsov, the deputy foreign minister, arranging the withdrawal of the IL-28 bombers that were still there after the missiles had been removed. And Kuznetsov turns to him and says, "All right, Mr. McCloy, we will get the IL-28s out as we have taken the missiles out. But I want to tell you something, Mr. McCloy. The Soviet Union is

not going to find itself in a position like this ever again."

And it was at that point, as you look back, that the Russians started their big surge in strategic weapons. Various members of the Kennedy administration who stayed over into the Johnson administration never believed that the Soviets would go for a force that was larger than the U.S. had. And yet that's exactly what they've done. I'm not laying this at anybody's door. The events of life led there. But these fellows are patting themselves on the back for their statesmanlike handling of this situation, and I think if you look at it with a cold eye, you can say that this probably wasn't a golden moment for American foreign policy.